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TRAS

Winter Newsletter
DECEMBER 2008

HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND
YOUTH IN TIBET, NEPAL AND INDIA

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A big THANK YOU to all our members for your continuing support in these difficult economic times! I'm really impressed by the depth of commitment by TRAS members, especially our sponsors of individual children.

At our November board meeting we approved four new project proposals (described on Pages 2 and 3), which we hope you will be able to support!

TRAS is in a good position to continue helping children and youth in the Himalayas, thanks to the past and ongoing generosity of our members. It's helpful that TRAS operates on a relatively modest scale - \$5,000 or \$10,000 goes a long way in funding a project - and the board has been careful to make sure that TRAS is financially sustainable, with low overhead and a balanced budget. Our aim is to provide modest support to worthwhile health and education projects, sustained over a long period of time. We're in it for the long haul!



As in past years, you can make a donation in the name of a family member or friend, and we can send a Himalayan card to the recipient, telling them that you have made a donation in their name and thanking them for it. Please call the office no later than Tuesday, December 17, to allow time for Heather to handle

your donation and send the card.

Our sincere thanks also to the groups which have helped us this year: Langara College Continuing Studies; Langara Rotaract Club; Libraries Across Borders; RR Smith Foundation; Argyle and Sutherland Secondary Schools in North Vancouver; the UBC Global Health Initiative; and BCx3 Book Club.

On behalf of the board of directors, I hope you and your loved ones have an enjoyable holiday, and best wishes for 2009!

Russil Wvong



Chefs at Argyle's Himalayan Night

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Sutherland Student Council

PROJECTS FUNDED IN 2008

TIBET

Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten, Lhasa. 60 children. Sole funding for school. \$8,196. (See report on p. 5.)

NEPAL

Buddha Academy, Kathmandu.

- Infirmary maintenance for school of 600 children. \$3,600. Many thanks to the TRAS members who took this on after our plea in the September newsletter!
- Vocational Training. 15 students per year. \$11,000. (Dr. Penn's \$5,000 challenge matched by Langara Rotaract, Sutherland and Argyle Secondary Schools, and donations.)
- Female Health Education. \$1,300 for books and lecturer. (R.R.Smith Foundation.)

INDIA

TIBETAN PROJECTS

Little Flowers Creche, Dharamsala. 30 children. Annual maintenance of daycare for Tibetan government-in-exile workers. \$1,650.

Dekyiling Daycare, Dekyiling Tibetan Settlement. 30 children. Final payment \$1,045. Additional \$355 for salary increase.

Doeguling Tibetan Settlement, Mundgod. Old People's medical support. TRAS Victoria Branch and several donors sent \$3,193.

Choepheling Tibetan Settlement, Miao. Books for school library, \$4,000. (Libraries Across Borders)

INDIAN PROJECTS

Munsel-Ling School, Spiti Valley (joint UBC/ TRAS)

- Salaries for 2 healthcare workers. \$2,020.
- Construction of one greenhouse. \$4,110.
- Healthcare Centre Dispensary supplies. \$1,000.

In all, \$57,241 will have been sent between April 1, 2008 and March 31, 2009. This includes some 2007 payments which could not be sent earlier.

PROJECTS APPROVED FOR 2009

Renewed projects:

Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten - \$9,090
Buddha Academy

- Infirmary - \$3,600
- Vocational Training - \$11,000

Little Flowers Creche - \$2,650 (see report on p. 6)
Dekyiling Daycare - \$3,488
Doeguling Tibetan Settlement – donations received

New projects:

1. Munsel-Ling School, water tank and distribution system - \$11,445
2. Munsel-Ling School, clean bedding for the 230 boarders - \$13,363
3. Dhargeyling Tibetan Settlement, Tezu, books for school library - \$4,800



Packing Tibetan books for Miao

A description of the new projects:

1. **Munsel-Ling School suffers from a severe water problem.** The source of water is government controlled, so out of their hands. However, a large water storage tank can be filled at peak water times, to be used when water is scarce. It is to be well-insulated against the cold, with the pipes of the distribution system well buried to keep them from freezing. It will supply the kitchen, the healthcare centre, the bath houses and the staff quarters. Smaller tanks will store the

Projects for 2009, continued from p. 2...

water at each location. A solar passive water heating unit will be installed at the kitchen, which will save the energy currently required for the water boiler and for cooking.

TRAS is keen to supply this system to the school. It will be a huge help with the implementation of the health program (so that the children can wash hands frequently to eliminate many illnesses, so that laundry can be done to reduce skin problems and bugs, and to keep the kitchen more sanitary).

2. From a health point of view, we feel it is also necessary to provide **clean bedding for all the children** who board at the school. The current bedding is 12 years old, filthy, stained and alive with lice and bedbugs. (See the September newsletter for a description from the UBC team.) Without much water, the bedding has rarely been washed, and now that the skin problems and bites are being treated, we don't want to put the children back in the 'buggy' bedding. **So we are hoping you will all help us make sure that every child has a clean bed by next spring.**



A photo from the 1960s: "A little Tibetan refugee carries away his new bedkit." Photo by Murray Dryden of SCAW.

We have applied for help to a wonderful charity called "**Sleeping Children Around the World**" (SCAW). Way back when the Tibetan refugees were pouring into India, and the Tibetan Homes Foundation was set up to cope with the orphans, SCAW came to the rescue by providing the bedkits for each child.

SCAW was founded by Murray Dryden (Dave and Ken Dryden's father), and he travelled the world taking photos of the children with their new bedding for his donors back in Canada. Murray passed away in 2004, but his family and friends carry on his work. Worldwide, they have provided nearly 1 million bedkits!

SCAW provides bedkits for children between the ages of 6 and 12, so we have asked them for help with providing kits for the 142 children in that age group. TRAS feels strongly that we have to provide clean bedding for all the children at once (to be fair, and to prevent the spread of bugs to new beds). Each bedkit costs \$58.10, so we are looking for \$5,112.80, to start with (for the 88 younger and older children), and if SCAW cannot help us, we will need a further \$8,250.20.

Can you see your way to providing a bedkit for a very needy child? \$58.10 buys a mattress, a thick quilt, a pillow, cotton sheet and pillow case.

3. We were so thrilled that **Libraries Across Borders** agreed to buy books for the school at the Miao Tibetan settlement that we are also applying to them for books for the nearby Tezu settlement.

Where are Miao and Tezu? If you make a fist with your left hand and point your thumb out to the right (like a rough map of India), Miao and Tezu would be on the tip of your thumbnail. They are in a sensitive area, bordered by China and Myanmar. It is a restricted area, which few are allowed to visit, and consequently the Tibetans get little help.

They are poor settlements, the main hope being that if the children get a decent education, they can leave the area to find jobs. A good supply of books will help enormously.

SPONSORSHIP REPORT

Spare a thought as you read this newsletter in a warm place, protected from the wind, rain and snow, to the young Tibetans who, as you read, are making a perilous journey on foot across the Himalayas, struggling through the winter snow across high mountain passes. A journey so traumatic that many years later they still find it difficult to talk about it.

Winter is a time when most try to escape into exile, as they have a better chance of reaching their destination and achieving their goal of seeking an education and a better life than that destined for them if they stay in Tibet. Many are illiterate teenagers who have not had the opportunity to go to school; others have had limited schooling; few have had the chance to enter high school.

Those who arrive in Dharamsala are sent to one of the TCV schools where they enter special opportunity classes for young adults and begin their schooling. After 2 years, those who show academic potential will enter grade school, graduating in their mid to late 20s; those not gifted academically will be transferred to a vocational institute where they learn skills to be able to work and support themselves.

These are a few of the young people who currently need our help. A year's sponsorship is \$400.

Please use the enclosed slip, or phone the office (604-224-5133), if you are able to help. If, in these unstable times, you might find sponsorship difficult to undertake on your own, think about sharing the pleasure and satisfaction with family, friends or colleagues!

Marion Tipple, Sponsorship Director

Penpa had a tough journey. He was sent by his family with some businessmen. They were stranded on the mountain for 10 days due to an avalanche, and many of the businessmen turned back. Despite his young age he continued with the few who didn't and succeeded in reaching Dharamsala. He has done well at school, is now in 9th grade and wishes to be a dietitian.

Tsering had a little schooling but had to quit to go out to work to help his family. He escaped into exile last year and is now in the second year of the opportunity class. He is an outspoken, responsible young man who, with the chance he has been given, should do well.

Gyamtso is one of 8 children from a nomadic family. He entered exile with two of his younger sisters last year. None of the children has had any formal education. Gyamtso is studying hard to catch up. He enjoys learning Tibetan and wishes to become a teacher.

Dolma reached exile with a businessman after many hardships sustained during the month's journey. She had received basic schooling in Tibet but as the third of seven children it was difficult for her family to continue to support her. She is doing well at school and especially enjoys working on the computer which she would like to pursue as a career.

Jamphel joined the school earlier this year. The eldest child of nomadic parents, she was adopted by her uncle and spent her life looking after cattle. She has never been to school. Currently she is in the first year of the opportunity class and is studying hard, feeling lucky that she has this opportunity.

Namgyal, the third of five children, has never been to school, having had to spend all her time working in the fields. After a difficult journey, she has settled down in school and is enjoying her studies in the special opportunity class. In the future, she would like to become a nurse.

Nawang is an active, healthy young boy, the youngest of a peasant family of five. He is currently in Grade Three and loves to run around pretending to fly, so naturally he wishes to become a pilot when he is older.

NEWS FROM THE PROJECTS

A letter from **Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten's** founder and principal:

"A few words that I must say is that due to the Society's funding, the Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten has been able to exist for twelve years. So I am most thankful to all the previous and present leaders, members and staff of TRAS.

"Recently, the Lhasa City Education Bureau held a general meeting on September 10, which was China's Teacher Day. Chimei, our teacher, was awarded at the meeting. Although our school housing condition is inadequate – lags far behind others – nevertheless, **Chimei is chosen as one of the best teachers** among all the others. She has been working very hard, teaching the children for twelve whole years." **Congratulations, Chimei!**



Chimei is second from right in back row, next to the Principal

A TRAS member visited Lhasa Yutok Kindergarten recently and reports the children are as happy and exuberant as ever. She was appalled

by the poor state of the building. We are encouraging the school to look for better premises. The single decrepit room, with no playground, really is inadequate. Space is at a premium in this old part of Lhasa, where modern Chinese building is encroaching from all sides. The parents naturally want the school to stay in this Tibetan neighbourhood, and we are hopeful a solution can be found. This may increase the cost of this project.

Lama Tashi has sent this report, telling us that the greenhouse at **Munsel-Ling School** is a success:

"Greetings from cold, desert-like, high, hilly Spiti. Heavy early snow fell in Spiti in mid September. At present weather is clear but quite cold. We have already started fires in the junior classes. Three classes will have vacation at the end of this month, and juniors will leave school at the end of December (*they take their long vacation in the winter in Spiti, when it is too cold and too difficult for the day students to travel*). Children are doing brushes (*we presume this means they are cleaning their teeth!*).

"**Amazing news!** The greenhouse started to produce 40 kg of spinach a week! We are using it with thukpa and chapati. Now we will see how long it will produce – until December or January?"



40 kg of spinach!

If you can access the TRAS website at www.tras.ca, you can see our newsletters in full colour! If you are happy to save paper and just read the newsletters online, could you let the office know? Many thanks. We do not print in colour, to keep costs low.

News from Projects, continued from p. 5...

You will notice that the funding for **Little Flowers Creche** in Dharamsala has been increased to \$2,650 a year for the three-year project. This is a result of the necessity to increase the extremely low salaries of the staff.

A letter from the secretary of the parents' group describes the scene in Dharamsala.

"Dharamsala is a very small place with a very large population which is growing every day because of the large numbers of people pouring in; some from Tibet, some as students, some to seek jobs, some for spiritual reasons – foreigners and Tibetans alike. So every nook and cranny of this wet hill is covered with houses and people. Thus landowners can charge insane rents. A house such as you see in the Tibetan settlements would be an impossibility here even if you have luck the size of a planet.



"Because it is so wet (wettest place in India) there is no commercial vegetation, so resources and food are brought in, adding to the cost. The roads are very narrow and falling apart most of the time, so public transportation is not abundant. We have to take taxis when we cannot walk.

"Also there are more opportunities for jobs here, because of all the Tibetan government

offices, which means people do not stay in low paying jobs.

"All this means we are desperate to be able to offer more to our staff. At present what we pay them is barely enough for a single person, and impossible if one needs to look after a family.

"We send many hopes and warm regards to all at TRAS."

We have responded to their plea with an increase of \$1,000 a year, the first time we have increased our funding to them.

TOFINO TRIUMPH

Congratulations to TRAS member Pipo Damiano for carrying out a most successful fundraiser for TRAS! Pipo came to one of the Nepali film festivals in Vancouver, and having recently moved to the tiny BC coastal town of Tofino, thought it would be exciting to introduce that community to a unique view of life in Nepal. He arranged for a hall, borrowed films from TRAS – and next thing he knew, he had an overflow crowd and was turning people away!

Pipo writes: "Hello from rainy Tofino! Just came back from the theatre - the Nepalese film festival was a complete success: it was a record attendance, we actually had to turn people away (unheard of). We showed 4 films and fed everybody lentils and yogurt and chai. I hosted the event. We raised \$481! Quite a few people seemed interested in donating online, and therefore get a tax deductible receipt. Thanks again for lending me the movies."

The funds raised will go towards the Dekyiling Tibetan Settlement Creche in north India. Pipo is thinking of doing a tour with the 2009 films, to Tofino, Ucluelet and maybe further afield. THANK YOU, PIPO!

The films from the Nepali film festivals are available at the TRAS office, if you wish to watch them (for a donation), or run a film evening, as Pipo did. Small towns seem ideal for this! Do try it!

ALL ABOUT BOOKS AND PEOPLE

After thinking about the cold harsh winter in the Himalayas and while you are still curled up in your cozy chair by the fire, how about a good read? These are all about the difference one person or couple can make in this troubled world, and it's heartwarming stuff.

Three Cups of Tea, by **Greg Mortenson** and David Oliver Relin, tells the story of an intrepid American mountaineer who, sick, exhausted and starving, gets lost near K2 in Pakistan. The result of his rescue by villagers is the creation of a series of schools where none was before. It is an incredible story of perseverance in the face of many difficulties and of eventual success in helping to spread the benefits of education in a remote area. **Does this sound like the work TRAS has done over the years? YES** – with one exception: we have been lucky enough to find partners in the areas where we work who are already of a like mind and want to help their own people, and we support their efforts.

Now turn to the December 2008 *National Geographic*, page 66, and read the article "Necessary Angels," to understand why, for many years, TRAS has concentrated on providing the most basic of primary health care in Himalayan villages, Tibetan settlements and Buddha Academy. We have trained hundreds of community health workers, the front line in preventive medicine. It is fantastic to see their profession given its due in this article, and even better to see that the system started by one couple, **Raj Arole and his wife Mabelle**, both doctors with a vision, is being copied around the world and in the whole state of Andra Pradesh. You will read about the changes that happen through such initiatives as clean water, hand washing, immunization, latrines, vegetable gardens, and women's empowerment. **These same initiatives have been the ingredients of many TRAS projects in India and Nepal.**

And what about the couple who founded TRAS? Some of our newer members may not even know that TRAS was started by **George and Inge Woodcock** after a trip to India introduced them to the plight of the Tibetans in 1962. But this lack of knowledge will soon be a thing of the past, for we are excited to tell you about a new book which will honour the Woodcocks.



TRAS director Jennifer Hales told us last summer: "Today as I was walking on 4th Avenue, I overheard a man say to his companion, 'I drive this car because it used to belong to George Woodcock.' 'This,' I thought to myself, 'I have to check out.'

"Turns out the man, Alan Twigg, was a great friend of both George and Inge, who left him their car. Alan is an accomplished, published author (see his website, www.alantwigg.com). He is the editor and publisher of the magazine *BC Bookworld* (www.abcbookworld.com).

"Alan was extremely pleased to learn that TRAS still exists and wants to learn more about what TRAS does today. He was very, very enthusiastic, to the point of giving me a huge hug (and allowing me to touch the car!). Since our conversation on the street, he's been percolating an idea. He wants to write a book about George and Inge, highlighting the great contributions they have made to the world, including TRAS."

Since that chance meeting, Alan has been busy. This week he writes:

"As you know, I am considering making a tribute book about the Woodcocks, the Dalai Lama and India. Something to emphasize the human side of George & Inge. George's volumes of autobiography reveal very little and, of course, Inge's

life is barely recognized in historical terms. Their contributions to the formation and success of TRAS and CIVA (Canada India Village Aid) are inspirational and that charity-based part of their lives deserves to be celebrated.

"2009 will mark the 50th anniversary of the Dalai Lama leaving Tibet for asylum in India. I hope to get the background of both TRAS and CIVA, and any royalties (probably not a great deal) would be divided between those two charities. It should be a book with lots of photos of people—Tibetans in India, etc.—to emphasize how many people's lives were positively affected by George & Inge. It is remarkable that both TRAS and CIVA are still going strong. More people should know about that.

"If any **TRAS members would like to share memories of George and Inge** with me, please contact me at bcbookworld@telus.net."

We will let you know as soon as the book is published!

TRAS

Supporting health
and education for
children and youth
in the Himalayas

#720-999 West Broadway
Vancouver, BC V5Z 1K5

Tel: 604-224-5133
E-mail: tras@portal.ca
Web: www.tras.ca

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Joan Ford Dorothea Leach

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COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, Dec 10, 2008

International Human Rights Day

5pm to 7pm: Candle-Light Vigil
Vancouver Art Gallery (Robson Street side)
All people concerned about Human Rights are invited to
light a candle in solidarity

Event organized by **Canada Tibet Committee, Van-**
couver, www.tibet.ca

Saturday, Dec 15, 2008

FILM SCREENING with Q&A: Leaving Fear Behind **“Risking Everything, Tibetans in Tibet Speak Out”**

7pm (by donation)
Café Kathmandu, 2779 Commercial Drive (at 12th Ave),
Vancouver

Event organized by **Canada Tibet Committee**

Sunday, March 8, 2009

4TH Nepali Film Festival

Already plans are afoot for the 4th Nepali Film Festival! Mark your calendars – all day **Sunday, March 8, 2009**, at Langara College in Vancouver! Watch our website, www.tras.ca, for more details in the new year.



On the Road with the Red God: Machhendranath



Argyle Secondary School puts on another successful Himalayan Night fundraiser for Buddha Academy in Kathmandu